

Ervin to Quiz Army on Files

3/12/71
By Peter Braestrup
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sen. Sam J. Ervin (D-N.C.) said yesterday he plans to summon new Army witnesses to "tell us what they have in their computers" concerning political activities and personal habits of American citizens.

Testifying last week, Assistant Secretary of the Army Robert Froehlke told Ervin's Constitutional Rights Subcommittee about new Pentagon restrictions on military spying upon civilians. He suggested that this job be given entirely to the FBI.

However, as Army officials then noted, some eight million dossiers (mostly involving security checks on servicemen and defense contractors) remain at Ft. Holabird, Md. Ervin said yesterday he wanted more details on what information is in those dossiers and what the Army is doing with it.

Aides said fresh details would be sought not only from

the Army but also from the Justice Department, whose special controls and new congressional safeguards against bureaucratic invasion of privacy.

After 13 months' investigation, said subcommittee staff director Laurence M. Baskir, "We don't yet have a very clear idea of what we don't know."

Testifying yesterday, Jerome Wiesner, president-elect of Massachusetts Institute of Technology, former science aide to President Kennedy, and an antiwar figure, mirrored Ervin's concern:

"I doubt that anyone is aware of the full extent of the surveillance and information collection activities that go on," he said. "Many people, myself included, have long operated on the assumption that our activities are being monitored."

Wiesner suggested that a watchdog agency, possibly a division of Congress' General Accounting Office, plus judi-

cial controls and new congressional legislation might provide safeguards against bureaucratic invasion of privacy.

Also calling for safeguards was Sen. Adlai Stevenson 3d (D-Ill.) whose name, with those of other political figures, turned up in dossiers kept during the Army's 1967-70 anti-riot surveillance effort uncovered last December by the Ervin panel.

"Trust, essential to our self-governing society," Stevenson told the Women's National Democratic Club, "has been eroded by those who sought to counter civil disturbances with spying and data banks ... which only George Orwell and we in our nightmares could have conceived a generation ago."

Another Ervin witness, Secretary of Transportation John Volpe, promised controls over the computerized National Driver Register, which stores state-provided records about revocations of individual drivers' licenses for all causes.

The information, Volpe said, is used to prevent convicted "killer drivers" from getting new licenses in other states, their driver records available to anyone, including insurance companies and employers, for a fee.